



Roman Magic Figurines from the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire: An Archaeological Survey

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with magic figurines from the Western provinces of the Roman Empire based on an inventory of twelve figurines and their archaeological context. It underlines the place of the figurines in the ritual of defixio and demonstrates that complex curse rituals such as those described in the Greek Magical Papyri (GMP) were not performed only in the Mediterranean basin. It also notes that these magic Western figurines are often found in important places (such as cities and large villas) and in late contexts.

Keywords: figurines; magic; *defixio*; curse rituals; Roman Western provinces; Fishbourne; *Greek Magical Papyri*

INTRODUCTION

Graeco-Roman magic is well known through literature¹ and through such evidence as *defixiones*, magic figurines ('voodoo dolls'), amulets and apotropaic representations of the evil eye depicted on mosaics or bas-reliefs.² *Defixiones*, commonly called curse tablets and binding spells, are one of the most important sources. They are inscribed, small, thin sheets (generally of durable materials such as lead),³ rolled up and sometimes pierced by one or more nails⁴ or placed with a 'magic figurine'.

¹ e.g. Tupet 1976.

² Audollent 1904; Preisendanz 1973–1974; Betz 1992; Bonner 1950; Kotansky 1994; Jordan 1985; 2000; Faraone 1991a. Other apotropaic symbols can be mentioned including the medusa, owl and *fascinum* (Johns 1982; Dunbabin and Dickie 1983; Trombetta 1999; Bailliot 2010, 28–69).

³ Many scholars suggest that lead was used for curses because of its properties: darkness and coldness. Some tablets support this hypothesis such as a fourth-century B.C. *defixio* from Attica: 'Let Pherenikos be bound before Hermes Chthonios and Hekate Chthonia ... just as this lead is worthless and cold' (Audollent 1904, n. 107, translated by Faraone 1999, 112). It has to be emphasised that other kinds of writings were engraved on lead (e.g. lead labels with written texts and commercial letters on lead-plaques) and that wax for example — which is not

Defixiones were a form of magic practised all over the Graeco-Roman world that bound a victim to the desires of the practitioner (*defigens*). The ritual was private and performed to ensure victory in a legal dispute or competition (races, games), to gain another's affections, or to separate lovers.⁵ Curse tablets were often placed in a grave with the soul of a dead person in order to accomplish an evil deed or in a locus which enabled contact with chthonic deities.⁶ They have been traced back archaeologically to the sixth to fifth centuries B.C. in Greece and Sicily⁷ and continued to be used until the sixth to seventh centuries A.D.⁸ Despite such longevity, the premise of the binding curse remained unchanged.

It must be emphasised at the outset that this paper rejects conventional definitions of magic and aims to avoid any of the resulting misconceptions about 'magic'.⁹ In fact owing to the conflation¹⁰ of 'magic' and other religious procedures such as *devotio*, for example,¹¹ it follows the thinking of Hendrik Versnel who favours a more flexible approach with definitions being adapted to each precise case.¹²

It is well-known that in Rome too much interest in the supernatural was regarded with suspicion or was a pretext for a death sentence, according to the social and political context.¹³ Nevertheless magic cannot be considered as a set of beliefs and rituals whose rules conflicted with the conventional rules of religion.¹⁴ In the specific case of curses, magic used the ideology of religion and its practices such as sacrifices. While magic had different intentions from religion and implied different relations between human beings and gods with regard to the action of constraint,¹⁵ it can still be argued that magic rituals corresponded to religious strategies which placed the victims in the hands of divine wrath because of *sacrilegium* and impurity.¹⁶ Some

described as a specific magical material — was used for *defixiones* as suggested by Ovid (*Amores* 3.7.28–30): 'Do charms and herbs hurt my poor self now, some witch transfixes my name in scarlet wax (*defixit nomina cera*) and sticks fine needles right into my liver?' (translation: Kline 2001). See also the verb *figo* in Ernout and Meillet 1939, 234. Lead was also used to make cult statuettes (e.g. a small lead plaque depicting a goddess from Fishbourne Roman Palace: Bailliot and Symmons 2012, 252, fig. 6a. For other examples see Green 1978). Magicians used both materials (lead and wax) certainly because they were easy to engrave. The magical properties of lead — darkness and coldness — which cannot be totally rejected are only known through late exegesis (Charvet and Ozanam 1994, 18).

⁴ Luck 1985; Graf 1994; Ogden 2002.

⁵ Audollent 1904.

⁶ They can also be found in domestic contexts as at Kempton in south-west Bavaria (Solin 1968, n. 10), Leicester (Tomlin 2008) and Chartres (Viret *et al.* 2013).

⁷ Jordan 1985, n. 1; Del Amor Lopez-Jimeno 1991.

⁸ e.g. *defixiones* from Apamea: *SEG* 34, 1437–8; *defixio* from Antiochia: Jordan 2000, n. 102; *defixio* from Amathus: Aupert 2008, 370–87. There are fewer such late agonistic inscriptions and all are related to the practice of chariot racing which continued at least until the seventh century (Liebeschutz 2003, 219).

⁹ Johnston 2003.

¹⁰ e.g. Schilling 1954.

¹¹ Versnel 1976, 370.

¹² Versnel 1991a. Therein Versnel emphasises that 'magic does not exist, nor does religion; what do exist are our definition of these concepts' (*ibid.*, 177). For a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the definitions given to magic see Meggitt 2013.

¹³ e.g. Apuleius who was accused of using magic to gain the attentions of a rich widow (Graf 1994, 79ff.; *ibid.*, 50–1 for another example). Examples of papyri burning can also bear witness to the illegality of magic, as in the case of the burning of magic books in A.D. 13 (Suetonius, *Augustus* 31.1): 'After he finally had assumed the office of pontifex maximus on the death of Lepidus (for he could not make up his mind to deprive him of the honour while he lived), he collected whatever prophetic writings of Greek or Latin origin were in circulation anonymously or under the names of authors of little repute, and burned more than two thousand of them, ...' (translation: Rolfe 1913). The death of Germanicus was attributed to a magic curse (see Tacitus, *Annals* 2.69; translation: Jackson and Moore 1931).

¹⁴ Scheid 2005, 127.

¹⁵ e.g. of constraint in magical texts (*PGM* iv, 2089–93). Blackmail was also used by magicians (Graf 1994, 249–52).

¹⁶ Bailliot 2010, 150–7. The etymology of the word *sacrilegium* (from *sacer*: 'sacred, holy' and *legō*: 'gather; take, steal') implies that sacrilege means 'to steal the possessions of the gods from the temples or dwelling places'. Cf. 'To

curse called ‘judicial prayers’ indicate that the stolen goods (a priori robbed by the victims) belong to the gods, while other *defixiones* give the victims the status of a dead person. In such circumstances magical action was justified, because the stated *sacrilegium* and impurity forced the gods to punish the victim. In this way, magicians can be considered as ‘mediums’ who reported the crime to the gods and who were constrained to create the necessary curse in order to purify the community. A *defixio* expresses the idea in the words: ‘... except for (?) the one who wrote this curse and who destroyed the adversary, because he did not act of his will, but he was forced to do so by thieves.’¹⁷

Considering all the weaknesses inherent in conventional definitions, this paper also believes that it is more productive to concentrate on the tangible evidence, which reflects the place of magic in the lives of the ancients, and to focus more closely on recent archaeological discoveries, which provide data permitting us to observe the rationality of magic.¹⁸ Of course this point of view is based on the archaeological nature of the data, but it also takes into account the *Greek Magical Papyri*¹⁹ which have provided significant information on the curse ritual (sequences, gestures, invocations and hymns)²⁰ as well as demonstrating — before the more recent archaeological discoveries — that the deposition of curse tablets required some sacrifices and occasional figurines depicting the targeted victims. This paper will also follow the analyses of Fritz Graf who notably disproved the assumption that transfixing figurines with needles was meant to hurt and who argued that such objects were not identical to the victims.²¹

Generally magic figurines — fashioned from wax, lead and clay — are a few centimetres tall. Their limbs are often bound or twisted and can be pierced by nails or needles.²² While such figurines are commonly seen as being specific to the Mediterranean basin,²³ recent discoveries show that they were also used in the Western provinces of the Roman Empire. Germany, Austria, Britain and France have yielded twelve figurines. Comparisons with identified Mediterranean figurines and descriptions given by the *Greek Magical Papyri* show that most are linked to magic even though they initially seem to be little more than ‘exotic’ surprises for archaeologists excavating domestic settlements. This short survey focused on the Western provinces sets out to complement the fundamental study and inventory of Greek, Etruscan and Roman

make my meaning clearer, I will follow my usual practice and quote a familiar example. A man who has stolen private money from a temple is accused of sacrilege’. Also: ‘It is sacrilege to steal something sacred’ (Quintilian, *Institutes* 7.3; translation: Butler 1920). *Sacrilegium* is illustrated by a few examples discussed by Scheid (1981, 137–42), such as magic formulae which accuse the victims of having committed an impiety (*PGM* iv, 2441–2621; iv, 2622–2700; vii, 593–619).

¹⁷ Versnel 1987, 9.

¹⁸ e.g. Witteyer 2005; Piranomonte 2005; 2012; Bailliot 2010; Bevilacqua *et al.* 2012; Wilburn 2013.

¹⁹ *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (abbreviated *PGM*) contain spells, formulae, hymns, rituals and notably various ways to curse enemies. Greek and Demotic papyri recovered in Egypt are dated between the second century B.C. and the fifth century A.D. They were also used in other provinces of the Roman Empire (e.g. Betz 1992, xli). The body of these documents was first translated by Karl Preisendanz and published from 1928 (Preisendanz 1973–1974).

²⁰ Research which notably shows local variations in the ritual (Mees 2009; Gordon and Marco Simón 2010; Bailliot 2010; Wilburn 2013) emphasises the discrepancy between the reality and the notions of ‘subversive magic’ inherited from the nineteenth century.

²¹ Graf 1994. This wrong assumption is based on the idea of sympathetic magic inherited from James George Frazer’s work. See also Versnel 1998.

²² Faraone 1991a; Versnel 1988, 289–90; Ogden 2002, 245–6; Del Amor López Jimeno 2010. Some of those figurines present prominent genitals or show quite a high level of realism (e.g. Du Bourguet 1975; 1980; Kambistis 1976), while the majority are roughly shaped. Most were used for erotic purposes but some for other ends such as legal disputes, as the *defixio* found with figurine F3 at Mainz suggests. This curse, only indicating the personal name of the victim (‘Trutmo Florus, son of Clitmo’), could be a judicial prayer (curse against thieves) (Versnel 1991b; 2010). Nine small lead figurines depicting race-horses recovered at Antiochia (Seyrig 1935, 48–50) demonstrate that magic also targeted animals in order to overwhelm their owners.

²³ Greek mainland and the islands, Sicily, Italy, Egypt, North Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor and Black Sea areas (Faraone 1991a, 200–5).

‘voodoo dolls’ by Christopher Faraone published in 1991²⁴ and already supplemented by further discoveries.²⁵

ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURINES IN RITUALS

Beyond the dramatic portrayal of pierced dolls and violent formulae inscribed on magic sheets and literature,²⁶ the *defixio* ritual was primarily technical and performative.²⁷ This ritual also described as ‘persuasively analogical’ was based on a belief in the power of formulae and was designed to restrain and inhibit the victims.²⁸ Spells were deployed to encourage future action and were linked to the gestures or wished-for state of the victims. The aim of the ritual was to bind or nail them down (*καταδένειν* in Greek and *defigere* in Latin). According to this logic, the nailing and twisting of figurines was supposed to render victims unable to resist. Victims were to be weakened in the same way as the figurines were tortured. The gestures represented on the figurines depended on the aims of the curse, so that twisting, binding or nailing could also be replaced by other treatments such as decapitation²⁹ and burning. In many amatory spells torture with fire was supposed to cause the victims to burn with passion.³⁰ A spell from *Hadrumetum* (Sousse/Tunisia) illustrates the case: ‘Let Vettia who begat Optata burn . . . with love and desire for me.’³¹ The choice of the material employed to fashion figurines was in itself linked to the logic of this analogy. Clay, wax and lead are easily malleable. The properties of each can be connected with the wish to dominate the victims.

Figurines could also be replaced by animals, the choice being related to their qualities, especially weakness.³² A *defixio* found in a grave excavated at Chagnon (France) and designed to silence legal adversaries is based on the defencelessness of a young animal removed from its mother and on the nailing that it presumably suffered.³³ It is also based on the analogy

²⁴ Faraone 1991a.

²⁵ e.g. Del Amor López Jimeno 2010. Figurines are not always found together with lead sheets but we may presume that spells may also have been written on biodegradable materials which have not survived. I would like to thank Stéphane Sindonino and Michaël Brunet for allowing me to study the archaeological evidence from Reims, and the librarians who gave me access to unpublished sources.

²⁶ e.g. the description by Horace of a magic rite carried out within the cemetery of the Esquiline at Rome (*Satires* 1.8.23–50): ‘I’ve seen Canidia myself, wandering barefoot /With her black robe tucked up, and disheveled hair, /Howling with the elder Sagana: pallor making them /Hideous to view. They scraped at the soil with their nails, /Then set to tearing a black lamb to bits with their teeth: /The blood ran into the trench, so they might summon /The souls of the dead, spirits to give them answers. /There was a woollen doll there, and another of wax: /The wool one was larger to torment and crush the other. /The wax one stood like a suppliant, waiting slave-like /For death’ (translation: Kline 2005).

²⁷ Graf 1994, 142–51 and 232–3; Scheid 2005; Bailliot 2010, 19 and 72–3. Anthropologists describe performative rituals as formulae which strengthen, modify or create a situation by virtue of simply being uttered (e.g. the wedding formula ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’ which creates the legal union).

²⁸ Faraone 1991b, 8.

²⁹ Wunsch 1902.

³⁰ Faraone 1999, 58.

³¹ / *ardeat Vettia quam peper[is] Optata ---] / [a]moris et desiderii(!) m[ei] causa ---] / [-----] (Audollet 1904, n. 266). It should be noted that Versnel (1998, 146–64) distinguishes binding spells containing selections of body parts which indicate that the victim should be restrained in his actions (e.g. transfixing a tongue in the context of a legal dispute) from *defixiones* with descriptions of tortures which are not directly relevant to the social context of the curse. In the latter case, he argues that the abundant descriptions of tortures were made to exert an irresistible rhetorical pressure upon the addressee. The same assumption can be proposed for the figurines. The action of burning them (which can correspond to fire and to fever) does not necessarily indicate an erotic curse.*

³² Faraone 1999, 66.

³³ Audollet 1904, nn. 111–12.

between the silence of the dead person from the tomb in which the curse was deposited and the incapacity of the victims to testify at court: ‘Just as the mother of this kitten is unable to defend it, so too may the legal advocates of these men be unable to defend them. Just as this kitten is unable to get up, so too may they be unable (to get up). May they be transfixed, just as this one is.’³⁴ Another example also expresses the process, making a parallel between the binding of a rooster and the fate of the targeted victim: ‘Just as this rooster has been bound by its feet, hands and head, so bind the legs and hands and head and heart of Victoricus, the charioteer of the Blue team, for tomorrow.’³⁵

A parallel can be drawn between the figurines and depictions of victims which appear on certain inscribed sheets. The tied legs and hands of figurines³⁶ are reminiscent of some images of victims engraved on curse tablets, such as the example of a *defixio* from Carthage.³⁷ These drawings engraved next to the spells had the same function as bound, twisted and nailed figurines³⁸ and were used to enhance the magic spells.³⁹ Moreover, figurines were sometimes placed in lead boxes, possibly representing coffins, as in the case of a small rectangular lead container from Athens kept in the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels and first published by Cumont.⁴⁰ Other examples include six third- to fourth-century wax dolls each enclosed in a single lead canister from the temple of Anna Perenna at the Piazza Euclide in Rome.⁴¹ Piranomonte argued that these containers served to ‘isolate the victims, to undermine their social and moral integrity, and to express the fact that they have been “caught” by magic attack and are never to be free’.⁴²

A funerary meaning has also been suggested. It can be said that cursing was based on the symbolic separation of the living and the deceased performed during the funerary rituals⁴³ and that its goal was a kind of anathêma (temporary or permanent) made in order to suspend the membership of the victims from the community of the living.⁴⁴ As an example one might note a sentence from a *defixio* found in a grave at Minturno (Italy), which seems to create a parallel between the fate of the victim and the religious and legal status of the dead person buried in the tomb: ‘As the dead man is received neither by gods nor humans, so may Rhodine be received by Marcus Licinius and have as much strength as the dead man who is buried here.’⁴⁵

³⁴ ... quo/modi(!) hic catellus aversus / est nec surgere potest{!} / sic nec illi sic transpi = Excti(!)(?) sin[t] / quomodi(!) ille / quomodi(!) in hoc m[fo]n[u] = Imce = Ontko) ani/malia ocb = Mmutuerun(t) nec surge/re possunt) nec illi mut[fi](?) / (translated by Faraone 1999, 66–7).

³⁵ [in]imicos(!) /Atracatetracati gal/lara precata egdarata / hehes celata mentis ablata / {[et] a[d = T] Proserpinam hinc a[beant]} // (Audollent 1904, n. 241; translated by Faraone 1999, 101).

³⁶ For various examples see Faraone 1991a.

³⁷ Jordan 1988, n. 3. The fetters were also replaced by snakes on figurative *defixiones* at Rome (Wünsch 1898). For other examples and other potential comparisons see Bailliot 2010, 112–27.

³⁸ Bailliot 2010, 113; Wilburn 2013, 74–5.

³⁹ Two fifth-century wax figurines from Egypt — recovered with a love spell — depicted in an embrace are of note (Gager 1992, 15, 101–6; Wilburn 2013, 135–6). This discovery is the only example showing figurines in such a position. It enhances the formulae of the associated *defixio*.

⁴⁰ Cumont 1913. The left leg of the figurine is folded. The hands are tied behind the back. The head is bowed and the hair is wrapped. The box is 11.5 by 0.55 cm (3.5 cm high). The doll is 11 cm tall.

⁴¹ Piranomonte 2005; 2010; Polakova and Rapinesi 2002.

⁴² Piranomonte 2010, 206.

⁴³ For funerary rituals see Scheid 2005.

⁴⁴ Bailliot 2010, 72–6; Wilburn 2013, 91–2.

⁴⁵ Audollent 1904, n. 139. ‘Just as this dead person who is buried here can neither speak nor talk, so may Rhodine die as far as Marcus Licinius Faustus is concerned and not be able to speak nor talk. As this dead person is received neither by gods nor humans, so may Rhodine be received by Marcus Licinius and have as much strength as the dead man who is buried here. Dis Pater, I entrust Rhodine to you, that she be always hateful to Marcus Licinius Faustus. Also Marcus Hediud Amphio. Also Gaius Popillius Apollonius. Also Vennonnia Hermiona. Also Sergia Glycinna’ (translation: Beard *et al.* 1998, 268).

The funerary and ‘separating’ character of the ritual can be perceived through other evidence, such as the parallels drawn between the aims of the written curses and actions carried out directly on the figurines and on the tablets (which contained the names of the victims): burying and hiding *defixiones* and figurines was presumably designed to ‘send a victim to hell’ far away from the community of the living. The use of lead could also have had a funerary meaning and an irrevocable character as shown in a *defixio* from Kreuznach (*Crucinatium*) which says: ‘As this lead (tablet) remains, Valetis Sinto is sent to hell forever.’⁴⁶

Nailing (in the sense of *defigere* and *defixio*) could have been in line with the ‘sealing’ and with the conclusion of the ritual. This hypothesis is supported by the Latin word *clavus* (key or nail),⁴⁷ itself related to *clavis* (key), which comes from the verb *claudio* (shut, enclose). *Clavus* is also linked to *clausula* which means ‘end, conclusion of something’.⁴⁸ Both hypotheses (isolation of the victims and exclusion from the community of the living) are ultimately compatible.⁴⁹

INVENTORY OF FIGURINES

Throughout this overview of the use of figurines in magic ritual, several distinguishing features emerge, such as nailing, burning, binding/twisting and the placing of objects in containers. They enable the identification of anthropomorphic figurines recently found in the Roman Western provinces and thus increase the corpus of magic figurines. Some figurines remain difficult to interpret because of their appearance or their state of preservation and sometimes because of the lack of information about their archaeological context. The inventory follows a geographical order: (1) Germany – (a) Upper Germany; (b) Raetia; (2) Austria (Upper Panonnia); (3) Britain (Britannia); (4) France – (a) Gallia Belgica; (b) Gallia Lugdunensis. Figurines are numbered F1 to F12.

FIG. 1. (a) F1. Figurine from Mainz (after Witteyer 2005, 111, fig. 4); (b) F3. Figurine from Mainz (Photo: Generaldirektion Kulturelles Erbe Rheinland-Pfalz, Landesarchäologie Mainz); (c) F4. Figurine from Eining (after Spindler 1984, 113, fig. 96 right); (d) F5. Figurine from Eining (after Spindler 1984, 113, fig. 96 left); (e) F6. Figurine from Straubing (after Spindler 1984, 114, fig. 98); (f) F7. Figurine from Straubing (after Spindler 1984, 114, fig. 97); (g) F8. Figurine from Petronell/Bad Deutsch-Altenburg (after Gassner 2010, 224, fig. 3, Gassner et al. 2011, pl. LXXIX, fig. 18); (h) F9. Figurine from Fishbourne (after Bailliot and Symmons 2012; photo: M. Bailliot); (i) F10. Figurine from Reims (after Bailliot 2010, 110, fig. 25e; drawing: M. Brunet (INRAP)); (j) F10. Figurine from Reims and box made with cups (after Bailliot 2010, 97, 103, 105, fig. 23; photo: INRAP); (k) F12. Figurine from Piriac-sur-Mer (after Hervé-Monteil 2010, 52).

⁴⁶ Audollent 1904, n. 98.

⁴⁷ Ernout and Meillet 1939, 194–5.

⁴⁸ Bailliot 2010, 105.

⁴⁹ Bailliot 2010, 104–12; Wilburn 2013, 91–2.



0 5 cm

(1) GERMANY

(a) Upper Germany (F1–F3)Mainz (Rhineland-Palatinate)/*Mogontiacum*/sanctuary

Three second-century dolls shaped from clay were recovered from the sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna in the centre of ancient *Mogontiacum*. They were published by Witteyer.⁵⁰

F1 (FIG. 1a). The first figurine (10 cm tall) was roughly made of clay then partially baked. It has neither neck nor shoulders. The right leg and forearms are missing. The face is crude, and the eye cavities and nose seem to have been shaped using finger pressure. Despite the simple technique and the poor state of preservation, the genitals can be seen and indicate a male. The left side of the body shows holes which reveal that the doll has been pierced by needles.⁵¹ The figurine comes from a well located outside the *temenos* which had probably been abandoned during the second century.⁵² The object was probably intentionally (and partially) burnt. A parallel can be drawn with a figurine from Karanis (Egypt) presumably placed over fire in order to render the victim of the ritual inflamed with passion in *simila similibus* fashion.⁵³

F2. The second clay doll has disintegrated.⁵⁴ It was found in the fill of the same well as F1. The position tends to suggest they had been carefully placed.⁵⁵

F3 (FIG. 1b). The third clay figurine (15 cm tall) is a representation of a victim mentioned on a nearby rolled-up inscribed sheet.⁵⁶ It is broken in two pieces. Its body is oval and its legs are very short. The forearms are missing. The head and neck are well formed but it has no shoulders. The eyes are depicted by two small holes, while the mouth is also represented by a simple notch. The nose and eye cavities have been shaped together by finger pressure. Its body has been pierced all over with needles.⁵⁷ Moreover it has both breasts and prominent male genitals. The dual gender of the figurine presumably had a ritual meaning. Romans used to interpret human beings with doubtful gender as a sign of divine wrath or evil that had to be removed by being cast out beyond the limits of the city. When such a child was born it was regarded as a *prodigium*⁵⁸ and was sentenced to death as a necessary purification of the city and of the community.⁵⁹ Latin literature is rich in references to hermaphroditism as a source of fear and as *prodigia*.⁶⁰ The phenomenon appears, for instance, sixteen times in Livy's *The*

⁵⁰ Witteyer 2005. The finds are kept in the *Taberna archaeologica* at Mainz (General Direktion Landes Archäologie).

⁵¹ Witteyer 2005, 111.

⁵² Witteyer 2005, 109.

⁵³ Wilburn 2013, 132–6.

⁵⁴ That suggests it could have been partially baked as was figurine F1.

⁵⁵ Witteyer 2005, 111.

⁵⁶ Blänsdorf 2005, 13 n. 1; 2010, 156 n. 10. The text is: 'Trutmo Florus, son of Clitmo'.

⁵⁷ Witteyer 2005, 114.

⁵⁸ *Prodigium* was a sign about the future that came from the gods in the form of an incident or an abnormal phenomenon announcing an impending calamity over a whole community. To avert disaster, sacrifices or propitiating actions were performed to appease the concerned god(s).

⁵⁹ Delcourt 1986. Cicero (*On the Laws* 3.8.19) mentions that the *Law of the Twelve Tables* notes that a deformed child must be killed swiftly: '*Cito necatus tanquam ex XII tabulis insignis ad deformitatem puer*' (translation: Nisard 1864).

⁶⁰ A case occurred in Latium in 210 B.C. and is related by Livy (*The History of Rome* 27.37.5): 'After the people's minds had been freed from superstitious fears, they were again disturbed by intelligence that an infant had been born at Frusino as large as a child of four years old, and not so much an object of wonder from its size, as that it was born without any certain mark of distinction whether it was male or female, which was the case two years before at Sinuessa. Aruspices, called in from Etruria, declared this to be indeed a foul and ill-omened prodigy, which ought to be removed out of the Roman territory, and, being kept far from coming in contact with the earth, to be plunged into the deep. They shut it up alive in a chest, and carrying it away, threw it into the sea' (translation: Edmonds 1850).

History of Rome and six times in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (for men and women); Pliny the Elder also documented some sex changes. A similar ideological attitude can also be directly observed towards hermaphroditism, death and signs of evil. Such events were considered as impurities to which the response was a ritualised separation from the community of the living. The hermaphroditic character of the figurine may have been based on such beliefs in order to exclude the victim from the community of the living and to allow it to be cursed.

This figurine comes from a ditch previously filled with rubbish. It was found next to an oil lamp, the remains of some fruit and the rolled-up lead sheet. It was placed underneath a clay pot and the upper body was facing down.⁶¹ From archaeological observation it seems that the figurine had been thrown into the ditch and that the damage and position were not intentional. However the missing arms could suggest a ritual mutilation.

(b) Raetia (F4–F7)

Eining (Bavaria)/*Abusina*/unknown context

Two figurines have been published by Spindler.⁶² Unfortunately their archaeological context is unknown⁶³ and their dating is indeterminate.

F4 (FIG. 1c). The first figurine (12.1 cm tall) is made of clay. The body is stocky with a fairly rectangular head. The neck is thick and the figure has no shoulders. The nose and eye cavities seem to have been roughly shaped together. The eyes and mouth are depicted by holes. An additional clay strip stuck over the forehead indicates hair. The figurine presents exaggerated masculine genitals. The arms and legs are partially missing. It has been pierced in the chest, belly, forearms and legs.

F5 (FIG. 1d). The second clay figurine represents only the upper part of a body. The dimensions are not given. Holes probably made with a fine tip depict the eyes and mouth. The nose has been made using simple finger pressure on the clay. The head is circular but irregular. The forearms are missing. The figurine has been pierced in the chest. It presents damage perhaps due to both natural drying of the clay and ritual piercing but the manufacture is similar to figurine F4.

Straubing (Bavaria)/*Sorviodurum*/unknown context

Two hollow figurines containing seeds were recovered from the site.⁶⁴ They were studied by Spindler who suggested that they were linked to a mystery cult and may have been used as rattles;⁶⁵ their appearance and manufacture, however, resemble magic dolls. Unfortunately no details about the species of the seeds have been provided. Nevertheless comparison can be made with a magic doll which contained a spell written on a papyrus⁶⁶ and with seven wax figurines from Rome shaped around a bone.⁶⁷ There might also be a connection with magic spells giving instructions (magical papyri).⁶⁸ Unfortunately the archaeological context of these two dolls is unknown, so that no further information can be provided about deposition and dating.

⁶¹ Witteyer 2005, 111.

⁶² Spindler 1984, 113, fig. 96. Unknown location.

⁶³ The site located near the Danube, 30 km from Regensburg (*Castra Regina*), included a fort, a villa and two sanctuaries (Schmid 1910; Kellner 1971).

⁶⁴ This site, located in Lower Bavaria on the bank of the Danube, included a fort and a villa (Walke 1965).

⁶⁵ Spindler 1984, 114, figs 97, 98. Unknown location.

⁶⁶ Ogden 1999, 14, fig. 5.

⁶⁷ Piranomonte 2005, 101; 2010, 206–7.

⁶⁸ Some *Greek Magical Papyri* provide instruction on how to fashion a figurine, as for example a Hermes with a hollow bottom in *PGM* iv, 2359–72: (*Business spell*) ‘Take orange beeswax and I the juice of the aerea plant and of ground ivy and mix them and fashion a figure of Hermes having a hollow bottom, grasping in his left hand a

F6 (FIG. 1e). The first figurine (10.5 cm tall) has been roughly shaped, with a hollow body containing the seeds. Finger-prints can still be seen. The head is irregular but its awkward form may include ears. The nose and forehead are prominent and thus seem to have been shaped together using finger pressure. The eyes are depicted merely by two small holes made in the lower part of the curved forehead. The neck has been coarsely shaped. The arms are short and their shaping has formed a hollow chest. The right leg is missing and the left is only partially preserved. The figurine also has prominent male genitals. Hollow lines at the hips suggest that the doll has been constricted by some kind of twine, while it has been clearly pierced under the chest.

F7 (FIG. 1f). The second figurine (13.9 cm tall) has also been roughly shaped. The head is circular and the eyes are depicted by just two small holes made on the lower part of the curved forehead. A curved notch indicates the mouth. The neck is thick but the shoulders have been shaped. The nose and eye cavities are visible and are the result of quick finger modelling of the clay. The legs are short and the arms are partially missing. The left hip is strongly marked. The figurine presents prominent genitals and its masculine character can be recognised. A notch crosses the chest as if the ritual piercing has missed but another hole can be seen on its left side.

(2) AUSTRIA: UPPER PANNONIA (F8)

Petronell/Bad Deutsch-Altenburg (Lower Austria)/*Carnuntum*/sanctuary

The upper part of a pierced clay figurine was found during the excavation of the ancient sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus in the eastern part of the *canabae legionis*. It was published by Gassner.⁶⁹ The archaeological context dates the piece to the last quarter of the second century.

F8 (FIG. 1g). This figurine (5.8 cm tall) has an awkward-shaped head with a thick neck. The transition between the head and the shoulders is not very well shaped. The skull is elongated and flattened on both sides. The upper part of the skull presents stripes with wavy edges which may indicate long curly hair. The face is triangular. The nose and eyes are roughly indicated and have probably been shaped using finger pressure on the clay. A small irregular ball of clay seems to be present inside the circular hole which represents the mouth. In this case a comparison can be made with *defixiones* carried out to ensure a victory in a legal dispute, many of which sought to incapacitate adversaries (witnesses and lawyers) by altering their oratorical skills or their memory.⁷⁰ The doll has been pierced below the neck. The figurine comes from a late second-century well filled with ritual remains. This large pit contained charcoal, crushed stones, architectural and sculpted fragments, and wall-painting fragments, so it is not unlikely that its filling marks the destruction of a building. At the same time the possibility that this well had some ritual purpose cannot be ruled out. It also contained two major groups of finds: an homogeneous assemblage of *terra sigillata* (with a high proportion of drinking vessels, notably bowls of type Drag. 37, Cup Ludowici VM and Drag. 33, and a few

herald's wand and in his right a small bag. Write on hieratic papyrus these names, and you will see continuous business: I "CHAIÖCHEN OUTIBILMEMNOUÖTH ATRAUICH. Give income and business to this place, because Psentebeth lives here". Put the papyrus inside the figure and fill in the hole with the same beeswax. Then deposit it in a wall, at an inconspicuous place, I and crown him on the outside, and sacrifice to him a cock, and make a drink offering of Egyptian wine, and light for him a lamp that is not colored red' (translation: Betz 1992, 81). For other instructions see: *PGM* cxxii, 1–43 (*Charm to inflict illness*) and iv, 296–466 (*Wondrous spell for binding a lover*).

⁶⁹ Gassner 2010. Precise location unknown. The site was a Roman army camp settled on the Danube in Noricum. After the first century it became the capital of Upper Pannonia. The site was dug from 1978 to 1991 prior to a housing development. The pit from where the figurine comes was dug in 1979 (Gassner *et al.* 2011, 129).

⁷⁰ For various examples see Audollent 1904.

larger bowls and incense burners)⁷¹ as well as cups and numerous animal bones (selected parts of cattle and a high percentage of bird bones).⁷² The exact location of the figurine and the type of disposal were not documented.⁷³ The discovery of a single head within the rubble may recall the decapitation of some figurines such as the example from Attica which was deliberately decapitated, folded and pierced by two bronze nails.⁷⁴

(3) BRITAIN: BRITANNIA (F9)

Fishbourne (Sussex)/villa

A lead figurine was found by Kenny during excavations conducted in the neighbourhood of the Roman Palace.⁷⁵ It has been interpreted as a magic doll.⁷⁶

F9 (FIG. 1h). This figurine (4.3 cm tall) has been roughly made, but a very thin tip was used to depict the hair and eyes and a broader tool to define the buttocks. Its forehead is prominent and it has no mouth. The end of its right leg and its forearms and hands are missing. The damage to the upper limbs may be due to twisting. The left leg is longer than the right and bent under the body at the knee. There are no indications concerning its gender but notches on the face could represent a beard.⁷⁷

The archaeological context of the figurine — an excavation spoil heap — provides no further information about the deposit⁷⁸ but evidence collected from excavations elsewhere at Fishbourne (several votive finds, amulets and remains linked to a cult devoted to Cybele and Attis)⁷⁹ offers many clues to ritual activities. Moreover discussion of Building 3 (located about 100 m west of the area excavated in 1992) points to a religious/ritual explanation.⁸⁰

(4) FRANCE

(a) Gallia Belgica (F10–F11)

Reims/*Durocortorum* (Champagne-Ardenne)/cellar of large building

Two third- to fourth-century figurines were found in the cellar of a late Roman building⁸¹ during excavations by INRAP on Rue Saint-Symphorien. These revealed the presence of three magic deposits in the cellar of a large building (a *domus* or a *schola*) constructed in the late second or

⁷¹ Gassner *et al.* 2011, 147. The assemblage (Drag. 37, Lud. VM, Drag. 33, Drag. 31, Drag. 32, Drag. 43) dates the filling of the pit between A.D. 170/80 and 210/20. two coins have also been collected: a sestertius (A.D. 163.) and an as (A.D. 175/6).

⁷² Gassner *et al.* 2011, 146.

⁷³ Gassner 2010, 224, fig. 3.

⁷⁴ Wünsch 1902, 26–31.

⁷⁵ Kenny 1992a. The archaeological remains recovered in 1961 are very well known and were excavated by Cunliffe. The large villa was built in the first century and burnt down around A.D. 270 (Cunliffe 1971). It is the largest villa in Britannia and Northern Europe.

⁷⁶ Bailliot and Symmons 2012. The object is held in the care of Sussex Archaeological Society at Fishbourne Roman Palace.

⁷⁷ Bailliot and Symmons 2012, 249.

⁷⁸ Kenny 1992a. Its context indicates a late second-century date and metalworking activities (Kenny 1992b, 34). These would have supplied the nearby palace (decorative and functional items) during its renovation. The industrial activity was probably linked to this work.

⁷⁹ Cunliffe 1971; Manley and Rudkin 2003b, 188; Rudling 2008; Bailliot and Symmons 2012, 252.

⁸⁰ Manley and Rudkin 2003a, 4, 20–9; Manley 2000, 111.

⁸¹ Reims/*Durocortorum* became the capital of Gallia Belgica during the reign of Augustus.

early third century and destroyed at the beginning of the fourth century.⁸² These deposits were placed along the north wall of the cellar. One included the figurines.⁸³

F10 (FIG. 1i). The first figurine has been shaped from clay (8.4 cm tall). It seems that the lower part of its stocky body has been cut. The head is fairly rectangular. The neck is thick but the shoulders have been shaped. The arms, chest, belly and details of the face have been severely damaged. Needles or nails have deeply pierced the figurine all over the body (neck, under the arms, belly and pelvis). It was placed in a box made from two *terra sigillata* bowls (FIG. 1j).⁸⁴ The upper bowl was covered by seven small balls of a dark paste (or wax), which almost certainly had a ritual function. An iron key was placed beside the upper bowl and it is presumably linked to the symbolic ‘sealing’ of the curse ritual.

F11. A small pile of clay seems to represent the remains of another doll which has presumably disintegrated. The discovery can be compared with the remains of one of the three figurines at Mainz. The location of the magic deposits — a cellar — cannot simply be interpreted as a domestic context. In Italy and Gaul, some cellars were also places for ritual activities as is demonstrated by certain private oratories located in building basements.⁸⁵

(b) Gallia Lugdunensis (F12)

Piriac-sur-Mer (Pays de la Loire)/villa

A lead figurine was found in 2004 while INRAP was carrying out an archaeological evaluation prior to the construction of a Business Park.⁸⁶

F12 (FIG. 1k). The lead figurine (about 13 cm tall, 5 cm wide and 450 g in weight) is crude. Its regular thickness and crude shape suggest that it has been roughly cut from a flat piece of lead. Both hands are twisted. The left arm is bent above the chest. The right arm is twisted behind the top of its right shoulder as if bound. It is broken⁸⁷ and the damage is presumably due to deliberate twisting. The legs are bent. The left leg is shorter and incomplete. A notch can be seen in the middle. The right leg is bent at the knee and bound. Details of the eyes, mouth, chest and hair seem to have been engraved using a tool with a thin tip and perhaps stamped with a circular object. Its exaggerated genitals are flattened above the abdomen.

The archaeological context is well documented. It was found during an evaluation trench dug in the west wing of the *pars rustica* of the villa which was occupied by a wine-press, within late archaeological levels which also produced finds such as iron nails, a fourth-century *terra sigillata* sherd and nine bone fragments, one of which was burnt. Even though the context provided no other evidence of ritual activities, the appearance of the figurine suggests it was

⁸² Sindonino 2011; forthcoming.

⁸³ Bailliot 2010, 96–7. The finds are currently held in the care of INRAP Champagne-Ardennes. A complete publication of the magic deposits is forthcoming (Sindonino *et al.* forthcoming).

⁸⁴ Analyses of the finds carried out by INRAP are underway.

⁸⁵ Santrot 2007, 82; Joly 2010; 2012; Mauduit and Lambert 2008.

⁸⁶ Letho-Duclos 2004. The doll is held in the care of INRAP Loire-Atlantique. Full excavation in 2005, following archaeological evaluation, has revealed the remains of a Gaulish settlement followed by a Roman villa extending over 3.5 ha. The settlement, established during the first century, developed significantly during the Roman period (Hervé-Monteil 2010). Other remains indicate that the site was still active during the seventh century. During the first century, the site produced purple from *mucella lapillus* used for dyeing textiles. This production probably finished when the villa and its annexes, which were devoted to stockbreeding activities, were constructed. The settlement changed during the second century. New buildings were erected, including a warehouse (for agricultural goods), a house with a forecourt and private baths. Between the second and fourth century, the warehouse became a winery and a wine-press was added.

⁸⁷ Letho-Duclos 2004, fig. 37. The figurine has been restored to its initial state by the Arc’Antique laboratory in Nantes.

magic.⁸⁸ The presence of the figurine next to a wine-press raises the question of a potential link between the device and the curse ritual. Was it supposed to be ground up with other magic material and other dolls? Was the rotation of the press symbolically used in the ritual? Magic figurines completely twisted around, with head and feet or head twisted to the side, are not uncommon.⁸⁹ Was wine required in the ritual? Spells indicating the use of wine⁹⁰ and maybe grinding are frequent in the *Greek Magical Papyri*.⁹¹ Nevertheless, it is difficult to prove the connection, as the figurine comes from the destruction levels, hence its deposition need not necessarily be linked with the use of the press and the wine-making process. Moreover, its association with bones, nails and *terra sigillata* could simply reflect the abandonment of the item and not necessarily any ritual link.

CONCLUSION

This survey has revealed that magic figurines are often found in important places such as exceptional villas or provincial capitals. The presence of magical objects in the sophisticated palace of Fishbourne or in a major building (Reims or Piriac) might indicate that magic was performed at all levels of society and not only in the most marginal groups. This is what Tacitus seems to indicate in the case of Germanicus, general and member of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. In A.D. 19, near Antiochia, Germanicus was informed that he had been cursed. The information was based on lead curse-tablets with his name on them, human remains and partly burned bones recovered in the walls and the floor of the house in which he was lodged.⁹² It is also what seems to be confirmed by the curse tablets from Britannia which are motivated by the theft of valuable personal properties.⁹³ Moreover a *defixio* written on three different sheets found at Ampurias (Spain) seems to complete the testimony of Tacitus.⁹⁴ The issue is a border

⁸⁸ It recalls magic dolls studied by Faraone. It is flat, similar to a fourth-century doll (9 cm tall and 5 cm wide) found at Carystus on the island of Euboea in Greece (Faraone 1991a, 202 n. 15, pl. 11) and to 16 bound figurines from Tell Sandahannah (Palestine) cut in lead plaques (height around 5.08 and 7.62 cm) (Clermont-Ganneau 1901, 156). It is also similar to a couple of figurines recovered at *Volubilis* (Souville 1957). The Piriac figure is neither an amulet used to moderate sexual desire nor the representation of a local fertility god as first suggested (Hervé-Monteil 2010, 52; Bertrand and Cartron 2010, 30).

⁸⁹ Versnel 1998, 289–90.

⁹⁰ e.g. *PGM* i, 2359–72; iv, 1716–1870; xi, 636–69; xiv, 366–5.

⁹¹ Versnel 1988.

⁹² ‘After this, he left for Seleucia, awaiting the outcome of the malady which had again attacked Germanicus. The cruel virulence of the disease was intensified by the patient’s belief that Piso had given him poison; and it is a fact that explorations in the floor and walls brought to light the remains of human bodies, spells, curses, leaden tablets engraved with the name Germanicus, charred and blood-smearred ashes, and others of the implements of witchcraft by which it is believed the living soul can be devoted to the powers of the grave. At the same time, emissaries from Piso were accused of keeping a too inquisitive watch upon the ravages of the disease’ (Tacitus, *Annals* 2.69; translation: Jackson and Moore 1931).

⁹³ Tomlin 1988; 1993; Bailliot 2010, 143–7.

⁹⁴ Almagro 1952, 114–16; Solin 1968, nn. 26, 27, 28; Gager 1992, n. 52.

*Maturus proqura/tor Augusti consilium legati/ legati Indiceta/norum [consilium] Indiceta/ (norum)
 Olossitan[i] / Titus Aurelius Fulvus lega/tus Augusti /Rufus legatus Au/gus[ti].
 Consilium M. Fulvi / legati Olossi/tani Campanus/ [Fid]enti[us] at. . . -
 Fulvus legatus Au/gusti Rufus legatus/ Augusti Maturus/ proqurator Augusti/ legati atvocati [Indi]cetanoru[m].
 [Oloss]itani / Sempronius / Campanus Fi/dentinus at/versari / M. . . .iniquel/ Nem. . . nt. . . -
 [Ful]vus legatus/ [Aug]usti Rufus lega/tus Augusti Matu/[ru]s pro[clu]r[at]or/ [Au]gusti [c]ons[il]ium /
 [legati] atvocati [Indice]t[ano]ru[m]*

1. (side A) Maturus, Augustan procurator; councilor of the legate, (that is) the councilor of the legate for the Indicetani;

dispute between the Olossitani and the Indictetani. The curse targets the *legatus Augusti*, his assistant and the lawyer defending the Indictetani.⁹⁵

The survey also demonstrates that the magic practised in the West has clear parallels with the ritual-magical procedures known from the *Greek Magical Papyri* as performed in the Mediterranean basin. The places where figurines come from were in the main propitious to trade and exchange and exposed to outside influences. Through mapping, the survey indicates that some of these places provide evidence of oriental cults and the presence of the military, as at *Carnuntum* and *Mogontiacum*. It also underlines the role of private locations in magic, such as the cellar in Reims, in addition to the usual places for ritual (cemeteries and temples). Nevertheless, they still show an indisputable connection with chthonic deities. The dating of the Western figurines is centred on the second century, though the most recent figurine possibly dates from the fourth century. It is also interesting to note that the dating matches a period of progressive change, notably in the religious domain.⁹⁶

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(the advocate ?) for the Indictetani
 (side B) The Olossitani, Titus Aurelius Fulvus, Augustan
 legate; Rufus, Augustan legate
 2 (side A) Councilor of M. Fulvus, the Olossitani, Campanus
 Fidentius ...
 (side B) Fulvus, Augustan legate; Rufus, Augustan legate
 Maturus, Augustan procurator, councilor of the legate;
 advocates of the Indictetani
 3 (side A) Sempronius Campanus Fidentinus of the Olossitani.
 .. oppose me unfairly ...
 (side B) Fulvus, Augustan legate; Rufus, Augustan legate;
 Maturus, Augustan procurator; councilor of the legate;
 advocates of the Indictetani

(Translated by Gager 1992, n. 52.)

⁹⁵ Maturus, the procurator, seems to be Marius Maturus who was *procurator Alpium marilimarum* in A.D. 69 (ibid.): 'The Governor of the Maritime Alps at that time was Marius Maturus. He summoned the inhabitants, whose fighting strength was ample, and proposed to resist at the frontier the Othonians' invasion of the province. But at the first engagement the mountaineers were cut down and dispersed. They had assembled in random haste; they knew nothing of military service or discipline, nothing of the glory of victory or the disgrace of flight' (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.12; translation: Hamilton Fyfe 1912).

⁹⁶ e.g. Turcan 1992; Frankfurter 2000.

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